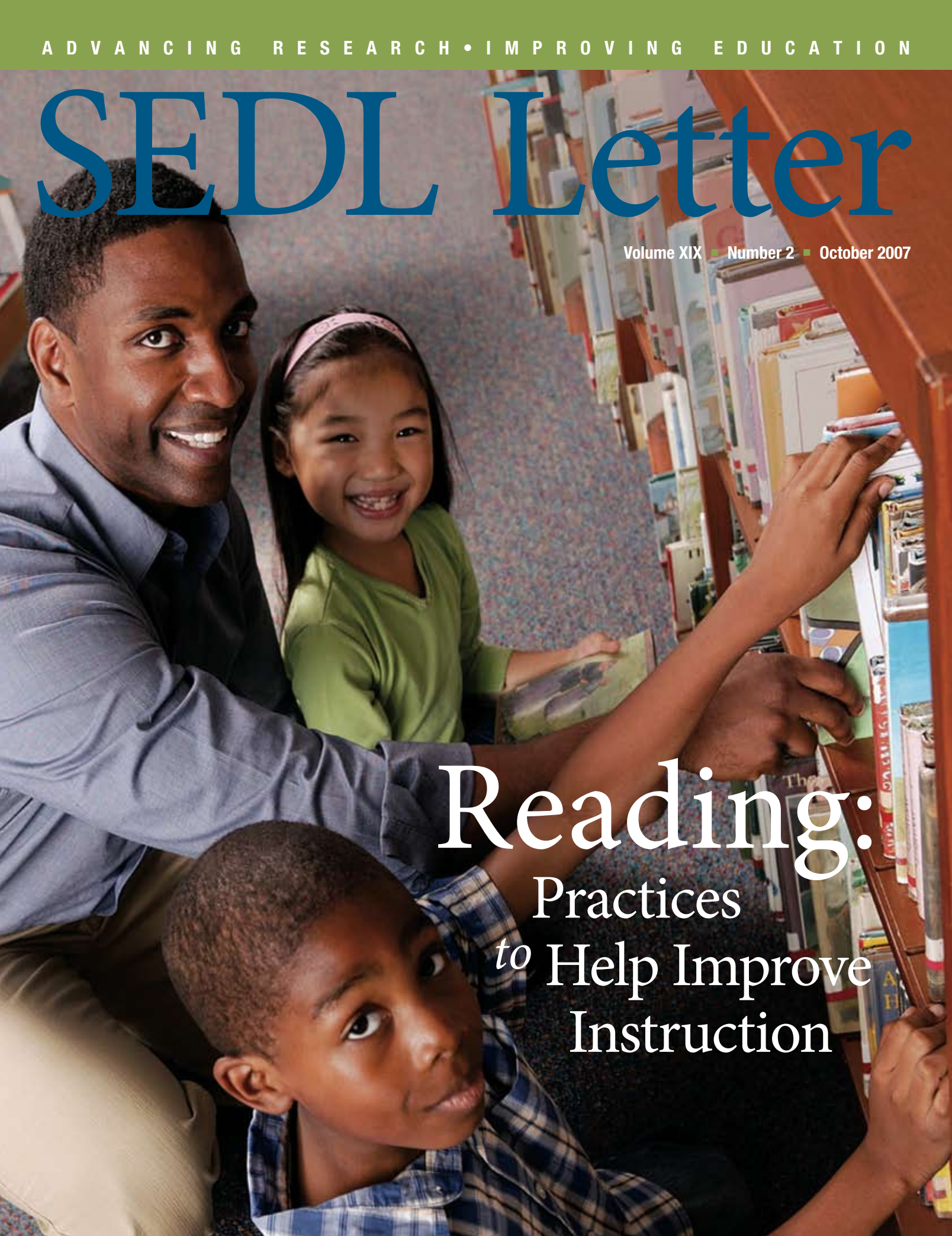


ADVANCING RESEARCH • IMPROVING EDUCATION

SEDL Letter

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A photograph of a man and two children in a library. The man, on the left, is smiling and looking towards the camera. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt. Behind him, a young girl with a pink headband and a green shirt is also smiling. In the foreground, a young boy in a blue and white plaid shirt is looking up at the camera. They are standing in front of tall wooden bookshelves filled with books. The man's hand is visible, reaching into the shelves. The overall atmosphere is warm and educational.

Reading:
Practices
to Help Improve
Instruction

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A New School Year, A New Issue of SEDL Letter

We hope your school year has gotten off to a good start! This issue of *SEDL Letter* focuses on practices that can help improve reading instruction and includes two announcements from SEDL that we think are exciting.

Our regular readers may remember an article last year about the new headquarters SEDL is building in Austin, Texas. We will be moving into our new building in mid-November. Along with the move, we are changing our logo and officially changing our name from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory to SEDL. Though our name will change, our work, people, and mission will remain the same. Learn more about these exciting changes on the back page of this issue.

When we move into our new building, we will need artwork to liven up the place. So we're holding an art contest for K–12 students. Rules and an entry form are on pages 17–20. Encourage students at your school to enter—this is an opportunity for them to creatively think about and illustrate what education and their future means to them. The winners and other entries will be displayed in the SEDL headquarters.

Now down to business. We begin this issue with a look at study groups, the practice of teachers getting together to focus on instructional practices and student learning. Stacey Joyner, a staff member of SEDL's Texas Comprehensive Center, discusses how these groups can be structured and how to get them started. Next, Jill Slack, a SEDL staff member with our Southeast Comprehensive Center, discusses the ways a classroom can be organized for effective reading instruction. Then we will visit New Orleans's Banneker Elementary School, one of the schools in the Recovery School District (RSD). Banneker students are benefiting from the literacy professional development SEDL is presenting to all RSD teachers.

Teachers aren't the only adults who can support children's reading efforts—parents have a big role to play, too. Mike Hall, director of Strong Fathers, Strong Families writes about his organization's reading nights designed especially for dads and their children. Finally, Ada Muoneke, who works with both of SEDL's comprehensive centers, discusses Response to Intervention (RtI). RtI is being discussed among educators across the country as a way to strengthen instruction for all students and more accurately identify students as learning disabled. Ada's article is an overview of RtI—a complex process that deserves careful consideration and study.

Best wishes to you and your students for a great school year.



The More We Get Together

By Stacey Joyner



Walk into a high-performing school and chances are you will find a group of teachers working and learning together. They might be planning future lessons, problem-solving, analyzing data, discussing strategies, or reflecting on their teaching. If the collaboration centers around teacher and student learning, it will likely lead to increased student achievement (Hord & Sommers, in press; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; DuFour & DuFour, 2006; Lambert, 1998; Lieberman, 1996).

When teachers work together, they participate in a valuable exchange of ideas, learning new things and contributing to each other's knowledge while improving the quality of their working relationships. Sustained collegial work leads teachers to become aware of their obligation to work together toward schoolwide problem solving and enhancement of their own teaching behaviors (Barth, 1990; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord & Sommers, in press). Stigler and Hiebert (1997) state:

A true profession of teaching will emerge as teachers find ways and are given the opportunities to improve teaching. By improving teaching, we mean a relentless process in which teachers do not just improve their own skills but also contribute to the improvement of Teaching with a capital T. Only when teachers are allowed to see themselves as members of a group, collectively and directly improving their professional practice by improving pedagogy and curricula and by improving students' opportunities to learn, will we be on the road to developing a true profession of teaching. (p. 21)

Despite the fact that research indicates that this collaborative, ongoing type of professional learning is more effective in promoting school improvement and increasing student achievement than the typical short-term

A teacher study group is a group of dedicated trusting educators . . .

conference or workshop (Ancess, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Sparks, 2002), it has been slow to take hold, especially in the low-performing schools that arguably need it most. These schools often seem stuck in the search for a quick-fix solution or one-shot workshop presented by an outside expert. While there can be a place for this type of training occasionally, it must be acknowledged that little deep learning takes place in this setting because of minimal opportunities to truly understand the purposes and implications of the concepts, to practice strategies, or to receive constructive feedback.

Teacher collaboration, on the other hand, provides a less formal and more interactive venue in which teachers can deeply discuss and question ideas and strategies at a pace that is comfortable to the group. Additionally, the ongoing nature of these groups offers teachers a chance to discuss a strategy or issue, break from the group to apply the strategy or contemplate the learning, and then bring ideas and experiences back to the group to share, analyze, and refine.

Professional learning through teacher collaboration is often the established expectation of a school or district that recognizes the value of such cooperation. These schools or districts often operate as formal professional learning communities (PLCs) where teacher study groups are recognized as learning opportunities for teachers within the broader learning culture of the PLC. Teachers who work in schools that don't operate as PLCs, however, sometimes organize a grassroots effort to work together out of desire or the need to reach out for assistance from others. These grassroots efforts should be commended and encouraged. While well worth the effort, collective learning can be difficult and time-consuming as team members work to schedule common planning times, plan for meetings, and maintain a regular schedule with follow-up. Leaders who recognize the efforts of teachers attempting to establish study groups and support them by providing sheltered time, space, and

resources that facilitate this collaboration should be applauded as well.

Terms typically used to describe this type of collaboration include "teacher study groups," "teacher inquiry groups," "professional inquiry groups," and "teacher networks." But what exactly is a teacher study group? It might be best to begin with what a teacher study group is not. A teacher study group is not an in-service where one "expert" presents ideas or explains how to implement a strategy. A teacher study group is not a staff meeting where school or department business issues are discussed. It is not a clique where complaints about students, colleagues, policy, or administration are aired.

A teacher study group is a group of dedicated, trusting educators committed to professional growth and mutual support. It is a group that gathers, preferably voluntarily, to openly reflect on goals, instructional practice, student learning, and theory. The study group could be a fairly large group of educators that assembles to find solutions to a significant problem (low student test scores in reading or high drop-out rate, for example), or it could be a small grade-level or content-area group that gathers to discuss such topics as implementation of reading workshops or the viability of portfolio assessments. Regardless of the type or size of the study group, there are steps and details that help ensure its success.

Phases of the Study Group Process

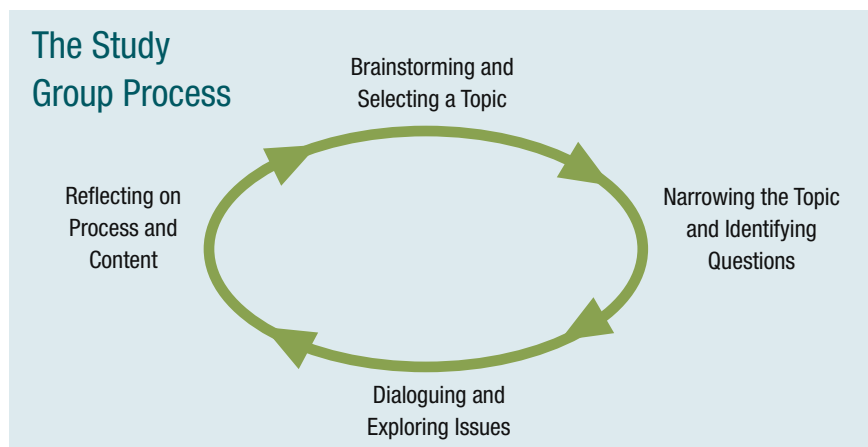
In their book *Teacher Study Groups*, Birchak et al. (1998) outlined four phases of the study group process that teachers progress through as they move within and among topics. The phases are

1. brainstorming and selecting a topic;
2. narrowing the topic and identifying questions;
3. dialoguing and exploring issues; and finally,
4. reflecting on process and content.

We encourage teachers as they begin to work through the four phases, to keep in mind the importance of discussing and studying research findings and considering practices that are supported by a strong research base.

Brainstorming and Selecting a Topic

The first phase involves identification of a topic. Topic ideas often emerge from an examination of concerns at the district, school, or classroom level. Perhaps newly implemented policies, school assessment information, or instructional problems are issues for the staff at the study group's school. These are all topics that a study group could consider. Keep in mind that topics should be directly related to school goals and student achievement. Once a topic has been determined, teachers interested in that topic will



commit to participate in that specific study group.

Norms and meeting logistics should be established and refined in the first few meetings. These initial meetings also offer an excellent opportunity for the group members to get to know one another and to build the foundations of an open and trusting relationship, which is critical if a meaningful dialogue is to ensue.

Narrowing the Topic, Identifying Questions

This phase of the study group process includes thinking about resources and strategies that will facilitate inquiry. It also allows group members the opportunity to focus attention on issues that are personally relevant (Birchak et al., 1998).

Dialoguing and Exploring Issues

The third phase of the process involves a series of meetings in which the issues and ideas are explored in depth. This phase is really the core of the process. The group first discusses these issues and ideas. Members often leave this meeting with an assignment—to read a chapter or journal article, practice a strategy, or gather more information or data. At the next meeting, the assignment results are shared and discussed. Group members often study research findings in this phase. Evidence-based and best practices are identified and discussed, then tried out. Sometimes group members find it helpful to receive input from outside experts or peers who are dealing with similar issues. It is important that teachers in the group feel comfortable enough to admit what they don't know. Developing this comfort level requires spending time building and strengthening relationships among group members. The role of the facilitator in this phase is central. The facilitator is responsible for ensuring equitable participation by all members and asking reflective questions that lead to deep and meaningful conversations. The facilitator keeps the conversations moving in a direction that focuses on the identified issues. Sometimes conversations veer in an unintended direction, which is acceptable as long as the study group members agree.

Reflecting on Process and Content

The phase in which study group members reflect on the process and content of the study group is an important one. It is helpful to pause at specific increments of the phase, perhaps once a semester, in order to assess the progress of the group. Group members can discuss what has been learned and what questions still exist. The team needs to make a determination at that point about whether to continue the discussion in its current direction, adjust the topic slightly and follow that path, or end the discussion and begin the brainstorming process again to identify a different topic.

The Study Group in Action

To illustrate how a study group might work, let's look at a group of teachers you might see at a typical elementary school.

Judy, Maria, Jerome, Dee, and Al are all second- and third-grade teachers. Through several discussions in the teachers' lounge, the group members discover that they are all troubled by the low reading comprehension test scores of several of the students in their classrooms. Maria is taking a university course as part of her master's program and mentions that her professor has recommended a recently published book that may offer the group some guidance. She asks the group members if they'd like to participate in a study group to discuss, learn about, and implement some of the strategies outlined in the book. All of the teachers agree. Maria, serving as the facilitator, approaches the principal about purchasing the book for each member of the group. The principal agrees, and the group schedules their first group meeting. Prior to the first meeting each group member commits to reading the first chapter, which will be the topic of discussion that day.

At the first meeting, discussions initially center around meeting logistics (selecting a comfortable and convenient meeting place and time, arrangements for group member absences, refreshments, etc.). They then begin talking about the first chapter of the book. As the discussion progresses, the group members decide that proceeding lock-step through the book, chapter by chapter, would not meet their needs. They collectively agree to begin with the chapters that address effective questioning and inferential skills—areas they agree that their students could benefit from the most.

The group spends the next 2 months meeting on a weekly basis, covering a chapter each week. Group members participate in a deep discussion about reading comprehension theory, best practices, and specific strategies outlined in the book. They often bring in research or professional articles that support or counter the author's opinion. In between study group meetings, group members practice reading comprehension strategies in their classrooms. They then return to the study group to discuss and compare their efforts—successes and failures—with their peers. Toward the end of the 2-month period, the group members agree to continue to regularly implement the comprehension strategies that they all agreed might be effective and to reconvene at the end of the semester to compare the reading comprehension assessment results of their students. They plan to make a decision at that time, based on the assessment results, about whether they want to continue their exploration into reading

Study groups can become more than a way for teachers to find solutions to the educational problems they face.

comprehension theory and instructional strategies or explore additional areas in which their instructional practices might be improved.

As with the group just described, study groups can become more than a way for teachers to find solutions to the educational problems they face. The groups can be an extremely beneficial professional development approach that impacts the classroom practice of the teachers involved and can provide a framework for collaboration that impacts the learning culture of the school as a whole. As Birchak et al. (1998) state:

A study group promotes an investigative environment that supports individually directed growth and influences the school community at large. While a study group is not the answer to every question and every problem, it does represent a movement away from divisive and isolated competitiveness, toward synergistic collaborations. It is a seed that can encourage teachers to believe in their right and their ability to ask and investigate questions, and to propose solutions. Through the study group, teachers confer upon themselves the respect often denied by bureaucratic traditions; they affirm themselves the educational experts and acknowledge their own professionalism. (p. 143)

When the staff is focused on student learning, this type of professional collaboration can have a direct and positive impact on student achievement (Bobbett et al., 2000; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Miller, 1982). Administrators, consider establishing teacher study groups as an effective professional development approach that will impact the effectiveness of teaching and learning in your school. Teachers, consider participating in an established study group at your school. If there is no established group, start your own. You, your fellow educators, and most importantly, your students will benefit greatly.

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Organizing for *Effective Reading Instruction*

Picture a classroom of 25 students. Six students are learning new vocabulary and reading with the teacher at one table. Eight students are working at language and literacy workstations, some collaboratively, others independently. Five more students are helping one another sort and use new words at the vocabulary worktable. Meanwhile, six other students are reading self-selected, leveled books at their desks, independently or with a partner.

Every 20 minutes, a timer goes off and the students move to a different activity. There are smooth transitions between activities—each student knows where to go and what to do. Student helpers contribute to the speedy transitions, monitoring each group's use of time and ensuring that each workstation is tidy and adequately supplied for the next group.

Near the end of the 90-minute reading block, the students return to their desks. The teacher then conducts a 10-minute whole-class lesson to review previously taught skills.

This scenario may sound too good to be true. But with the right management system, this scenario is achievable in many classrooms, regardless of the students' ages or grade levels.

Managing Instruction

Teachers work extremely hard to manage classrooms and instruction. They expend tremendous energy planning lessons, meeting the demands for assessment, and implementing curricula to help students achieve reading standards.

Some are more successful than others, but the unique challenge for most involves organizing whole-class and small-group instruction. "One-size-fits-all" instruction is not an option. Lessons appropriate for one group of students often do not meet the needs of another group.

To address the wide range of instruction within one classroom, teachers must become skilled at using data-informed, small group instruction (Kosanovich, Ladinsky, Nelson, & Torgesen, 2006) and flexible grouping practices (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001) to attend to individual variances and needs.

This article delineates routines and procedures to help teachers organize their classroom environment and reading instruction to positively affect student achievement and meet the needs of diverse learners.

By Jill Slack



*Successful
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Grouping for Instruction

Successful reading instruction begins and ends with a clear understanding of what students need to know and be able to do as defined by state standards. To gain that understanding, it is crucial that teachers establish processes for collecting and using appropriate data to determine students' needs and to inform teachers' decision making about which grouping practice or pattern will be used.

Decisions about grouping practices are generally easier to make than those about grouping patterns. Gibson and Hasbrouck (2007) recommend that teachers make decisions about whole-class or small-group lessons based on

- the purpose of instruction,
- the importance of the skill or concept, and
- how much time is available that day for instruction.

Depending on the students' skill levels and needs, a whole-class approach can be useful for the initial introduction of a skill or concept. This includes visually and verbally modeling a lesson. A whole-class approach can also be effective for practicing or reviewing a skill that everyone has attained to varying degrees.

To ensure student engagement in whole-class sessions, teachers can have students respond in unison to questions or ask them to use signals, such as "thumbs up, thumbs down," to indicate agreement or disagreement to statements made or questions asked. In addition, teachers can use pairing to have students discuss a concept, spell a word, or use a new term in an oral sentence.

Whole-class sessions work for overview-type instruction or guided practice. But to meet the specific reading needs of individual students, teachers need to provide data-informed, explicit, skills-focused instruction in small groups.

Selecting students for small-group instruction involves decisions about grouping patterns. Teachers can use homogeneous (similar skill) or heterogeneous (mixed skill) grouping patterns.

Mixing skill levels within small groups using high/medium and medium/low skill groupings is effective for teacher-led instruction. However, some skills or instructional purposes (e.g., assessment) are accomplished more efficiently and effectively with similar skill groupings.

The key to successful grouping is flexibility and using what works to achieve the instructional purpose.

Group memberships need to be compatible and changeable, reflecting what students can do and need. Regrouping should occur as often as achievement data indicate it is needed.

Organizing the Environment

Effective instruction involves establishing predictable, organized workspaces with routines and procedures that help students understand expectations and successfully complete their work (Marzano, 2003).

Teachers should think about how a classroom environment can be organized to promote effective whole-class and small-group instruction, including space for collaborative practice opportunities.

Teaching Table

Select an area for a teaching table where teacher-led, skills-focused, small-group instruction can occur. Choose a space where you can sit with a small group of students and teach, yet still be visible to all students. It should be located near materials often used for instruction, such as student books, workbooks, and writing tools.

Keep in mind that most activities that take place at the teaching table will be interactive—students will share the learning experience with other group members to encourage oral language and vocabulary development.

To help you determine how best to organize a teaching table in your classroom, answer the following questions:

- What kinds of instructional activities will occur at the teaching table?
- How many students will participate at the teaching table at one time?
- How many groups will I form so that each student meets with me daily?
- What kinds of grouping patterns will I use at the teaching table?

Workstations

Workstations are learning centers where students gather to work on specific literacy tasks. They provide excellent opportunities to extend instruction beyond the teaching table.

Workstations can be set up to engage students in activities such as conducting word study, writing, or participating in small-group discussions.

You can create workstations by pushing desks together in a cluster or using small tables or space on the floor. Some workstations can be single-use only, such as a computer station. Include single- and multiple-use workstations so students learn to work independently and in small groups.

The number of workstations needed depends on the number of students you will assign to workstations during each small-group period. Usually you need options for one third to one half of the class.

Be sure that workstation materials are easily accessible, and store all materials in plastic containers

with lids, organized by theme, use (e.g., particular month of the year), or skills so that they can be retrieved quickly.

When possible, change the activities at the workstations every few weeks to maintain student interest.

Know that creating beautiful workstations is not the purpose—you should not spend extraordinary amounts of time creating fancy workstations. Improving instruction and spending more time planning effective ways to teach is more important.

To guide your decisions about workstations in your classroom, answer the following questions:

- What types of workstations will best support my instruction?
- How many workstations will I need to create?
- How many students will participate in each workstation during small-group rotations?
- What plan will I have in place for students who complete their work early?

Worktable

The purpose of the worktable is to allow students to study and work collaboratively with a partner or in small groups to complete practice assignments.

Activities at the worktable extend the skills taught and learned at the teaching table. Preferably, students have demonstrated at least 70% mastery of skills at the teaching table before practice is expected at the worktable.

Encourage students to provide corrective feedback to one another at the worktable so you are not interrupted while teaching another small group.

Allowing homework to be started and sometimes completed at school is an incentive for students to remain on task at the worktable.

Some common and effective practice activities for worktables include the following:

- Answering questions at the end of a story or chapter of a book
- Spelling or writing assignments
- Research or special project assignments
- Activities for reviewing vocabulary to enhance word meaning and oral language
- Worksheets or workbook pages from materials provided in the core reading program

Daily Schedule

Regardless of the amount of time you have for reading instruction each day, developing a daily schedule to alternate times for whole-class and small-group instruction creates order and predictability. A well-organized schedule posted in the classroom communicates expectations and reduces stress for

90-Minute Instructional Schedule

8:00 – 8:10	Whole class overview
8:10 – 8:15	Transition
8:15 – 8:35	Small groups
8:35 – 8:40	Transition
8:40 – 9:00	Small groups
9:00 – 9:05	Transition
9:05 – 9:25	Small groups
9:25 – 9:30	Transition
9:30 – 9:40	Whole class closure

teachers and students. Use the following steps to develop a daily schedule for reading and language arts instruction:

1. At the top of a piece of paper, list the time at which the reading block begins, and at the bottom, list the time at which the reading block ends.
2. In between these times, list any prescheduled activities that cannot be changed. Such activities include library, computer lab, P.E., or music.
3. Look for open spaces on your list where you can insert periods for whole-class and small-group instruction.
4. Plan 10 minutes for whole-class overview.
5. Plan 20–25 minutes for small-group or independent practice sessions. The number of sessions may vary between two and four, depending on whether you have a 60-, 90-, or 120-minute reading block.
6. Plan 5-minute transitions between sessions. Once students develop routines, you will likely be able to decrease the transition time.
7. Plan 10 minutes for whole-class closure.



Establishing Routines and Procedures

Developing procedures for daily routines is critical to effective instruction management. The first step in accomplishing this goal is to clearly communicate expectations for student behavior during the various activities that take place every day.

Develop procedures and then model each one. This will help students internalize the procedures, which will eventually become routine after repeated practice and feedback. For instance, decide how students will enter your classroom and determine which activities they should begin immediately. Make and post a list of procedures, and review them daily with students. Remove the list once routines are established.

In addition, use the same language for directions, such as “Go to the teaching table now please,” and use consistent procedures for guiding students to activities (e.g., send the groups to the teaching table, then to the worktable, then to workstations).

There are countless procedures and routines that may be established. It is important that you prioritize those that will help you structure your classroom environment in ways that positively influence achievement. One of the most important procedures is that for rotating students through small-group activities to ensure that everyone participates in all activities at some point during each day or week.

Rotation Chart

Create a rotation chart that clearly communicates to students how they will participate in activities during small groups. The rotation chart should help students know

- what activity they will do first;
- when they will participate in each activity, including working with you in a small group; and
- which other students will be working with them in their small group.

You may want to color code the names of your groups.

A rotation chart that includes four activities—a teaching table, a worktable, workstations, and free reading with leveled books—is shown on page 11.

Lists of student names are attached at the top to identify group membership. The number of students assigned to each group varies according to student needs for skills-focused instruction.

Job Chart

To implement a procedure for delegating some of the classroom duties and responsibilities to students, develop a job chart and teach students to successfully perform each job so that you can provide uninterrupted small-group instruction and quick transitions while they are working.

Jobs will vary according to grade level, student capabilities, and teacher needs. Some job suggestions include the following:

- Chart caller—Reads the rotation chart and helps students get to activities
- Timekeeper—Monitors use of time in small groups and provides 5-minute warnings before transition
- Trash monitor—Assists other students in keeping desks and work areas clean
- Voice level monitor—Supervises and monitors noise levels
- Workstation monitor—Monitors use of workstations and helps students clean up and make speedy transitions
- Worktable monitor—Checks supplies and area surrounding worktable
- Supply monitor—Checks supplies in classroom and checks supplies in and out that students may need to borrow (such as paper, pencils, etc.)

After getting to know your students, you may want to select some of them for specific roles that they will particularly benefit from assuming. For instance, you may want to assign the role of Chart Caller to a student who is reserved or who does not

Rotation Chart Using Four Activities



often assume a leadership role in the classroom.

Creating clear and consistent routines and procedures is essential to success. The management tools described here help teachers deliver effective instruction and help students know what they need to do and what they still need to accomplish.

Through the implementation of an organized classroom and meticulous planning for small-group and whole-class instruction, teachers can succeed at providing the explicit instruction and guidance that each student needs in order to excel.

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Banneker Elementary School: On Course with Reading

By Leslie Asher Blair

It is a slightly overcast spring day in New Orleans. The 20 students in Jan Abraham's second-grade class at Benjamin Banneker Elementary School start off the day singing a song and signing the lyrics. Two of the students in the class are deaf, which isn't surprising since Banneker is a full-inclusion school.

At nearby Dr. Charles Drew Elementary School, Regis Philbin and Kelly Ripa are taping the unveiling of the school's new playground, funded by Disney-ABC Domestic Television and KaBOOM!, for their show, "Live with Regis and Kelly." Down the street from Banneker, a movie is being filmed. Adults conversing in a hallway at Banneker talk about the visiting celebrities and how "New Orleans is coming back." Nowhere is this revival more important than in the schools of New Orleans, including Banneker.

Banneker is by all accounts one of the best schools in the Recovery School District (RSD), which operates 39 schools and oversees 27 charter schools in New Orleans. The atmosphere at the school

is calm and organized. The principal, Cheryllyn Branche, and assistant principal, Sister Marie Noelle, were at Banneker before Hurricane Katrina. They stayed with the school throughout the resultant difficult months, providing support and guidance. All but one of the 17 regular teachers are certified, and not one teacher left the school during the 2006-2007 school year. These are undeniable accomplishments in a district challenged by personnel turnover.

Despite having good administrators and dedicated teachers, Banneker remains low performing. Generally, only one or two students in each class have met literacy benchmarks. Part of the problem lies with student mobility and the large number of students who returned during the school year. At the beginning of the school year, each class had only 15-18 students. By May, some classes had as many as 30 students.

"It's a challenge throughout the RSD," says Banneker curriculum coordinator Marianne Lemle.

Reading stories out loud is part of the "Text Talk" sequence that Jan Abraham uses in her classroom.



Recovery School District in New Orleans

Most of the schools in New Orleans are in the state-run Recovery School District (RSD). The RSD was established in 2003, before Hurricane Katrina hit, to turn underperforming schools into successful schools. When the hurricane struck 2 years later, the state legislature voted to put 107 of 128 New Orleans public schools in the RSD. Twenty-two New Orleans schools opened in that district during the 2006–2007 school year, not including charter schools. Seventeen more opened in Fall 2007. Most of the schools are preK–8 schools, a decision made pre-Katrina. Many parents and teachers have expressed concerns regarding discipline problems they associate with the large grade span, but lack of buildings and teachers following the storm have factored into the decision to keep the preK–8 structure.



Principal Cheryllyn Branche, teacher Jan Abraham, and assistant principal Sister Marie Noelle pose in the colorful library at Banneker Elementary.

She notes that some of the returning students have not been in school for 6 months or even a year. “It’s not their fault,” Lemle emphasizes.

According to Lemle, another factor contributing to low achievement is that most students lack a good foundation in reading. Former RSD superintendent Robin Jarvis (now program manager of SEDL’s Southeast Comprehensive Center) agrees with Lemle’s assessment. Jarvis notes that the district’s test data show below-level achievement at all grade levels. “The students did not get a good foundation in reading,” she says. “So we must begin at K–3 and address the foundation. Low achievement shows up in fluency and comprehension assessment in later grades but is attributable to foundation skills.”

SEDL reading staff conducted three literacy trainings for all of the teachers in the RSD during the past year. The trainings, customized for teachers in grades K–4 and 5–12, focused on theories of learning to read and research-based practices. The

training sessions for the K–4 teachers focused on phonological awareness, the articulation of speech sounds, components of an effective phonics lesson, and strategies for building fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The sessions for teachers in grades 5–12 focused on 15 elements of effective adolescent literacy programs, reading and writing in the content areas, processing systems that support reading, and research-based practices for improving fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Jill Slack, a project director with SEDL’s Southeast Comprehensive Center, says, “We worked closely with state staff to tie the training sessions to essential components of the Louisiana Literacy Plan and Reading First model, which in turn tie to the state standards. All teachers—reading, content area, and even those who teach electives such as art and music—learned and practiced a repertoire of research-based strategies to help their students become more competent readers.”

Improving Vocabulary Instruction

“Text talk” is an approach to vocabulary instruction developed by Drs. Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; McKeown & Beck, 2003) that focuses on teaching words from stories and poems read aloud to students. It takes advantage of young readers’ listening and speaking competencies to boost vocabulary development. Just reading aloud isn’t enough to improve vocabulary, but teacher-student discussion about the story, book, or poem can improve both comprehension and vocabulary. Teachers can help students understand what new words mean by providing student-friendly definitions, discussing the word in the context of the story, and relating the word to situations with which students are familiar. Teachers can also ask open

questions that allow students to make connections among ideas presented in the reading and conduct activities that enrich student understanding—in other words, provide opportunities for children to reflect on what is happening in the story or with the language.

Beck and McKeown (2001) noted that teachers also should encourage children to use the words after the initial discussion: “If children do not think about and use a word after initial instruction it is unlikely to become part of the vocabulary repertoire” (p. 18).

An example of a text talk lesson that focuses on vocabulary is shown below.

Sample Text Talk Instructional Sequence

1. Read aloud the story *Charlotte’s Web* by E. B. White.
2. Contextualize the word within the story.
 - * In the story, Wilbur was **enthusiastic** about making new friends.
3. Provide a student-friendly explanation of the word.
 - * **Enthusiastic** means you are happy or excited about something.
4. Have children say the word.
 - * Say the word with me, **enthusiastic**.
5. Present examples of the word used in contexts different from the story context.
 - * Someone might be enthusiastic about seeing a new movie, or someone might be **enthusiastic** about going to Disney World.
6. Engage children in activities that get them to interact with the word.
 - * Share something you would be **enthusiastic** about. Try to use the word enthusiastic when you talk about it. You could start by saying something like “I would be **enthusiastic** about _____.”
 - You could then say to a student, “Show us how you might act if you felt **enthusiastic** about _____.”
 - You could ask students: Would you be **enthusiastic** if
 - You could get a puppy?
 - You had to go to the doctor for a shot?
 - Your best friend was coming over to play?
7. Have children say the word again.
 - * What’s the word we’ve been talking about?

Based on the work of Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Linda Cuan, *Bringing Words to Life*.
Used with permission from Guilford Press.

Back in Jan Abraham's classroom at Banneker Elementary, visitors can see the results of the literacy training. With Abraham's guidance, the students discuss a book they recently read called *Cool Ali* and then compare it with a poem called *Summer Shower* that Abraham reads aloud. This gives the class the opportunity to discuss the weather and metaphors and to recall the plot and characters in *Cool Ali*. They also work on spelling, finish a syllable-sorting activity, study their vocabulary words, and talk about compound words. Abraham uses an approach to teach vocabulary called "text talk" (see the sidebar, "Improving Vocabulary Instruction") where she emphasizes certain vocabulary words in the story and poem that may be unfamiliar to most of her students. Today's words include "admired," "fussed," and "mimicked." She provides a student-friendly explanation for each word, uses it in the context of the story, presents other contexts, and provides opportunities and activities for the students to use the word.

The students' enthusiasm makes it difficult to believe they are low achievers in reading. They do so well on one of the vocabulary tasks that Abraham encourages them to "kiss" their brains, which results in a flurry of students kissing their fingertips, then touching the top of their heads.

Ginger Grant, a distinguished educator with the Louisiana Department of Education who works with schools in the RSD, notes that "the SEDL strategies were very teacher friendly—you can utilize them with any program." She adds, "Teachers don't have any reason to say they can't implement these strategies."

Kathleen Wagner, the reading intervention teacher at Banneker, agrees. She says the reading strategies can be implemented across the curriculum, too. "A lot of techniques teachers don't think they can use with the upper grades. That's not true," she says. "We forget we're still dealing with children. We can't presuppose they won't accept it. Vocabulary has been our weakest link. Now we're able to zero in on it."

The training covered the key ingredients of effective reading instruction substantiated by research, which also are reflected in the district's reading programs.



Former Recovery School District superintendent Robin Jarvis helps play a vocabulary game in Jan Abraham's second-grade classroom.

Teachers gained the knowledge to select the most relevant or critical instructional activities from the material offered by the core reading programs, depending on the needs of their students.

Wagner says the students at Banneker are clearly making progress. She produces a series of DIBELS reports and graphs for each K–3 class. The graphs show how much progress has been made since the first of the school year. By their lack of certain data, the graphs also show the number of students who have left the school or come to the school during the year.

"We don't have a lot of children at benchmark, but they truly have advanced," she reports enthusiastically.

Banneker Elementary School teacher Jan Abraham works one-on-one with one of her second-grade students.





Banneker principal Cheryllyn Branche and assistant principal Sister Marie Noelle are always willing to check a student's work.

Banneker helps teachers analyze student data. They rely on results from Louisiana's standardized achievement tests, iLEAP and LEAP, for grades 4–5 and the Scholastic Reading Inventory for grades 6–8. Because the school opened in April 2006 with a new staff and new students, virtually everyone began 2006–2007 at ground zero data-wise. “Teachers now know who is at benchmark and who is close. Next year we will know where we’re headed,” Wagner says.

Wagner is a veteran reading teacher, but she is the only interventionist for the entire school of 460 students. Banneker has only eight ESL students but a large population of students with special needs. Fortunately, the special education staff increased during the school year. College students from the Tulane Reading Buddies program also help out at the school. The student tutors received training about working with the children and coordinated with teachers to make sure Reading Buddies books and stories were the same as or were similar to stories being used in the classroom.

Wagner reports that the preK–2 teachers meet as group fairly often and grade-level planning is encouraged. For most of the school year, 1 hour a day was set aside for embedded professional development where staff could plan lessons and share strategies and lesson plans. “People have stayed the course,” Wagner says. “They are committed. We’ve built a team.”

Leslie Blair, MA, is a SEDL project director and communications associate. She is the editor of SEDL Letter. You may reach Leslie at lblair@sedl.org.

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Open to all K–12 students

SEDL National Art Contest

Theme:
Education
and My
Future

Read the rules for the
contest on the next page.

An Official Entry Form
is provided. Direct questions
to contest@sedl.org.



SEDL National Art Contest

Education and My Future

SEDL is pleased to invite students to participate in a national art contest. The contest is open to all K–12 students in the United States in public and private schools, as well as home-schooled students.

The theme is “Education and My Future.” We want to see students’ perspectives on how education impacts their future. This theme could take many forms, and we encourage creativity from each entry. What do you think education will be like in the future? How will we learn differently than we do today? What will education look like in the future? How will education help your future? What would your future be without education?

Artwork entry rules

1. Each entry must be the original work of a child between the ages of 5 and 18 currently in preK–12 studies. Adults may give verbal assistance, but they cannot add to the artwork.
2. Entries must represent any interpretation of the “Education and My Future” theme.
3. Entries must be on poster board or thick paper no larger than 11” x 17” and no smaller than 8½” x 11”. They may be created with any art media such as paint, chalk, markers, crayons, photographs, or digitized art. (All artwork using pencil, charcoal, or chalk should be sprayed with a fixative or covered with a transparent wrapping to prevent smudging.)
4. No copyrighted slogans, logos, or other materials are permitted.
5. Entries must be postmarked by November 1, 2007, and must have an official SEDL entry form enclosed with the entry (forms may be photocopied). One entry per envelope, although a class may include multiple envelopes of individual entries in a larger mailer. Limit one entry per child. Please ship in a flat package marked, “ARTWORK ENCLOSED. DO NOT BEND.” SEDL suggests using a mailing service if you are concerned about tracking the package. SEDL staff will not be able to tell you if/when an entry was received. SEDL is not responsible for lost, stolen, illegible, incomplete, misdirected, damaged, postage-due, or late mail submissions.

Mail submissions to:

Education and My Future Art Contest, SEDL
211 East 7th St., Suite 200, Austin, TX 78701

6. Failure to meet all of the requirements above will result in an entry’s disqualification.
7. Artwork will not be returned. Entries will become the sole property of SEDL and may be used, reproduced, distributed, modified in size or presentation, or displayed by SEDL, or its partners, for any purpose that benefits or is otherwise useful to SEDL. Entrants also assign any claims that have accrued or may accrue in the rights of the poster, whether known or unknown.
8. A panel of contest judges will select one grand prize winner and 11 runners-up. Winners will be judged in four different grade levels: grades preK–2, grades 3–6, grades 7–9, and grades 10–12. For each grade range, a first, second, and third place winner will be awarded. Artwork will be judged on the originality of design, clarity of message, and artistic merit. Each of the winners will be notified by phone, mail, or e-mail in early December 2007.
9. Winners and winners’ parent/legal guardian must sign and return a publicity release to grant permission to SEDL and any sponsor organizations acting under the authority of SEDL to use the winner’s name, winning entry, photograph, voice, and/or likeness, for publicity purposes, without additional compensation.

By entering the contest, entrants accept and agree to these rules and the decision of the judges, which shall be final.

Please be sure to read the rules carefully before preparing your artwork for this contest. Questions can be directed to contest@sedl.org.

For official rules, please refer to www.sedl.org/artcontest.

SEDL is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to solving significant problems facing educational systems and communities to ensure a quality education for all learners.

Prizes

SEDL will recognize first, second, and third place in each grade category by framing the work and displaying in SEDL’s new national headquarters in Austin, Texas. Our headquarters is scheduled for a January 10, 2008 dedication and grand opening. SEDL will also recognize the winners with a \$100 gift to their school and a certificate to their school and to the student. We will also display digital versions of their artwork on the SEDL Web site. In addition, **SEDL will make the following awards within each grade category:**

1st place: iPod 40 GB

2nd place: iPod Nano

3rd place: iPod Shuffle

One Grand Prize Winner selected from the first place winners in each category will receive a Mac Computer. The student, a parent, and their teacher will also be invited to Austin, Texas for a ceremony recognizing their artwork in the first half of 2008, courtesy of SEDL and the Stephen F. Austin Intercontinental Hotel. The trip will be coordinated to work with student, school, and family schedules.

Official Entry Form and Permission Slip

SEDL National Art Contest · Education and My Future

Student information

Name of student _____

Age of student _____

Grade level (as of October 1, 2007) _____

Title and description of artwork _____

School _____

School district _____

Teacher's name _____

School address _____

Student home address _____

Student home phone _____

Student email address (if you have one) _____

Student signature _____

Parent information and permission

Parent/Legal Guardian's name (printed) _____

Parent/Legal Guardian's email address _____

Parent/Legal Guardian's work or cell phone _____

I/we understand that all original artwork becomes the sole possession of SEDL and may be used in promotional, marketing, and education materials by SEDL without further consent, compensation, or approval.

Parent/Legal Guardian's signature _____

Privacy is important to us. We will not sell, rent, or give addresses, phone numbers, or email addresses to a third party. SEDL will publish the student's name, school, and hometown for all finalists.

Entries must be postmarked by November 1, 2007. Send entries to:
Education and My Future Art Contest, SEDL
211 East 7th St., Suite 200
Austin, TX 78701





Mail complete Official Entry Form and
Permission Slip with your submissions,
postmarked by November 1, 2007, to:

Education and My Future Art Contest
SEDL

211 East 7th St., Suite 200
Austin, TX 78701

Opening Books to Fathers and Children Strengthening Children's Literacy

By J. Michael Hall

When most people think about parent-child reading activities, they likely picture a mother quietly reading to their children. Very few people would envision a reading event for just fathers and children. Even fewer would envision a reading event where these same fathers and children are acting like donkeys, elephants, and gorillas. That is exactly what happens, however, at a Dad and Kid Reading Night sponsored by Strong Fathers-Strong Families. Strong Fathers-Strong Families is a training, technical assistance, and facilitation organization focused on connecting fathers to their children, to their local school or Head Start program, and to their children's learning outcomes.

Dad and Kid Reading Night encourages and teaches fathers to read to their children. The program's effectiveness is derived from using the inherent strengths of fathers. Instead of teaching men to read in a softer, more feminine way, these events model a more lively, no-holds-barred approach to reading and interacting with their children. In this activity men and children are settled into the floor together and a facilitator reads to them in a typically masculine way with lots of excitement, crazy voices, and noises. The books are carefully chosen both to reflect the father-child dynamic and to facilitate lively activity between the child and the father. To make this event effective, a Dad and Kid Reading Night must be interactive, relational, and focused on child outcomes.

The Strength of Interactivity

The interactivity is an integral part of the program because men tend to be more easily engaged through activity and fathers tend to engage kids in more rough-and-tumble play. Researchers say that this rough play can have a powerful positive impact on children, fostering curiosity and teaching them to regulate emotion and enjoy surprises (Pruett, 2000). By using a strength-based approach with fathers, practitioners can encourage and teach them to spend more time in reading *their way* to their children. Just as boys and girls are different and men and women are different, we must recognize that mothers and fathers are different (Pruett, 2000; Lamb, 1997; Park, 1995). Fathers and mothers parent differently



and interact with their children differently. That difference in parenting styles is also present in how fathers talk to and read to their children. A recent University of North Carolina study found a link between fathers who used varied vocabulary with their 2-year-olds and the children's more advanced speech at age 3, even though the fathers' spoke less often to the children than did the mothers. Mothers' vocabulary didn't have a significant impact (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, in press). A study of low-income Early Head Start fathers (Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, & Cabrera, 2004) found a link between fathers' stimulating play with their 2-year-olds and better language and cognitive skills in the children a year later, even when controlling for mothers' behavior. As early as the 1960s, psychologist Ellen Bing found (to her surprise) that children who had fathers who read to them regularly were more likely to do much better in many important cognitive skill categories than children who did not (Bing, 1963). One of the strongest benefits was a substantial increase in a daughter's verbal skills. These acknowledged paternal strengths are used to engage fathers with their children and to help fathers understand their own powers as readers.

Dads, kids, and even a few moms have a great time at Dad and Kid Reading Night.



Dad's Playbook: Coaching Kids to Read

Dad's Playbook: Coaching Kids to Read is a colorful, tabloid-sized booklet designed by the National Institute for Literacy just for fathers. It explains the five critical reading skills children need in order to become good readers and how fathers can help their kids acquire these skills. It also discusses why third grade is so important and includes stories from all kinds of fathers about how they help their children learn to read.

Now Available Free of Charge

Dad's Playbook may be ordered free of charge by e-mailing edpubs@inet.ed.gov or calling toll-free 800-228-8813. You may also download a copy at the institute's Web site, www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/pdf/Dads_Playbook.pdf.

an important role to play in the process. The relational hook is used as fathers and children are drawn closer and closer together through a series of books that start out on the emotionally "safe" side and then move into more tactile and intimate interactions like wrestling and hugging. Once the hugging starts, it is usually hard to stop, even among older elementary students. Most fathers are happy to oblige. Simply telling a man that he possesses a certain strength that

The Strength of Relationship

The premise of a Dad and Kid Reading Night is to bring fathers in to experience this power of masculine reading and how it impacts the education of their children. This experience is facilitated by reading to both fathers and children and having them interact with the books that are being read to them. Some of the books are focused on the father-child relationship, and some of the books are focused on fun activities between fathers and children. Even though the fathers are not reading to their children, they are learning a lot about the power they possess as fathers and masculine readers. Besides taking part in the activities, fathers are also observing other fathers playfully interacting with their children and the reaction of their children to both the books and the interplay between them. Therein lies the power of the event. It is not the actual reading of books, it is not the modeling of a masculine style of reading, and it is not the information that is being presented to the fathers during the workshop. Even though those aspects of the program are valuable, it is the interaction with their children during the activity that sells fathers on their personal power as masculine readers. The relational aspects of the event are the primary draw to both children and fathers. The event is billed as a "dad and kid" event. Instead of developing catchy titles like "Daddy Read to Me" or "Book Look," the creators of the program used a simple title that helps participants understand that they are invited together to come and interact. By using a title that puts the father and child on an even footing, you can communicate that they both have

can help his child can be helpful. When you show him his strength through the behavior of his child, it is more than helpful—it is powerful. The power of this relationship can be easily seen during such an event, and the fathers' evaluations following the event indicate that they saw it as well.



Dad and Kid Reading Night gets fathers and children to interact, using activities that draw from the books that are read.



Suggested Books for a Dad and Kid Reading Night



The most useful books for this type of activity are based on a positive father-child relationship, a set of positive interactions, or both. Here is a list of the books that Strong Fathers-Strong Families has made a standard for this program every time it is presented to dads and kids in schools and Head Start programs.

Head to Toe

by Eric Carle

This book is used as a warm-up to get everyone moving and allows the fathers to slowly become a part of the activity. It is also the activity that promotes participants to act like giraffes, buffaloes, donkeys, monkeys, and gorillas.

Guess How Much I Love You

by Sam McBratney and Anita Jeram

This book illustrates a loving relationship between father and son nutbrown hares. When used at reading night, it allows for fathers and children to literally show how much they love each other with outstretched arms and legs.

Going on a Bear Hunt

by Michael Rosen

This well-known story and song is presented in a beautifully illustrated book encourages fun interaction for dads and kids with lots of predictability and repeating text.

Octopus Hug

by Laurence Pringle

This book provides activities for dads and kids to do at home. It has a great story about a dad who stays with the kids while the mom is gone to dinner. Watching a group of fathers all give their kids an "octopus hug" (with eight arms) makes the all the effort you put into the event well worth it.

Other great books for dads and kids:

How to Be a Happy Hippo

by Jonathan Shipton

Night Driving

by John Coy and Peter McCarty

Daddies Are for Catching Fireflies

by Harriet Ziefert

Daddy Is a Doodlebug

by Bruce Degen

Daddy Makes the Best Spaghetti

by Anna Grossnickle Hines

The Daddy Mountain

by Jules Feiffer

Dad's Dinosaur Day

by Diane Dawson Heard

Kevin and His Dad

by Irene Smalls

Lots of Dads

by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly

My Dad

by Debbie Bailey

My Daddy and I . . .

by Eloise Greenfield

Night Shift Daddy

by Eileen Spinelli

The Night Worker

by Kate Banks

On a Wintry Morning

by Dori Chaconas

Pete's a Pizza

by William Steig

Rainy Day

by Emma Haughton

A Special Kind of Love

by Stephen Michael King

Tom and Pippo Read a Story

by Helen Oxenbury

The Very Best Daddy of All

by Marion Dane Bauer

Vroomaloom Zoom

by John Coy

What Dads Can't Do

by Douglas Wood

The Strength of Outcomes

Even though these events are fun, they must be planned and developed in such a way that they improve children's learning outcomes. Fun and games are ingredients of these events but not the main goal. There are all kinds of parent-child programs that have fun activities, but this event is designed to maximize the interaction, both verbal and tactile, between father and child. By focusing on the child outcomes, not only can you reach the goals of your campus or program, but you can also begin to form a partnership with the fathers and families to improve their children's outcomes. By giving fathers a job to do within their strengths and focusing them on the positive outcomes for their children, they are more than eager to join the team. Even if a father does not read well or cannot read at all, this activity can demonstrate to him that there is power in words shared through stories, specifically stories shared by a father. Although the event encourages reading to the children, fathers are also told that they can have a big impact on their children's literacy just through story-telling and direct verbal and physical interaction with their children. Many men are embarrassed or intimidated by their lack of competency in reading and/or reading out loud. However, when given options (that are still based on their strengths and in spite of their weaknesses) to benefit their children, they are more likely to rise to the occasion. In order to affect outcomes, the information that is provided to fathers is simple and direct. A tip sheet for fathers on developmentally appropriate reading skills provided by the National Institute for Literacy Institute (2006) is used to give fathers basic tips and hints to help them in their future reading activities. Fathers and children are encouraged to seek out some of the same books that were shared during the event to continue this interaction through some of the activities that they learned.

The Strength of Differences

If most educators were to see a Dad and Kid Reading Night in person, they might assume that it is fun—and at times even silly—but that it does not have any impact on student outcomes. However, by speaking to the strengths of the fathers, providing the fathers an opportunity to experience these strengths in a safe environment, and allowing the fathers to see their children's reaction to the activities, this event serves as a solid teaching tool.

Michael J. Hall, MEd, is the executive director of Strong Fathers, Strong Families. He is a former teacher and principal and was director of the Dallas-Fort Worth field office for the Center for Successful Fathering, Inc. As director of Strong Fathers, Strong Families, Mike conducts workshops around the country and makes presentations at the conferences of such organizations as the National Head Start Association, the Texas Association of School Boards' Parent Learning Network, the Dakota Father Initiative, and the California Head Start Association. You may contact Mike at mikehall@strongfathers.com.



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Response to Intervention (RtI)

A Systematic Approach to Reading and School Improvement

By Ada Muoneke

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) have created the need for significant systemic changes at all levels of the education system (Handler, 2006). These federal laws are intended to hold schools accountable for improving student learning and enhance the academic performance of every child. Spurred by the demand for improved student achievement, schools and districts are now seeking meaningful, research-based reform strategies to improve instruction.

Much attention has recently focused on Response to Intervention (RtI), an alternative approach to diagnosing specific learning disabilities. RtI focuses schools and districts on prevention and early intervention for students with academic difficulties (McIntosh, Chard, Boland, & Horner, 2006; Gersten & Dimino, 2006). It is a multi-tier instructional approach used in the general education classroom to improve the academic performance of struggling learners before they are identified as learning disabled (National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE] & Council of Administrators of Special Education [CASE], May 2006). RtI provides a way to identify students with learning disabilities based on dynamic assessment. Gersten and Dimino (2006) explain that RtI “seems much more direct and logical than relying on discrepancies between IQ scores and reading achievement scores” (p. 100). In fact, they report that the U.S. Department of Education advocated in 2005 that the IQ-discrepancy criterion for identifying students as learning disabled be abandoned because this “wait to fail” approach doesn’t help close the achievement gap. Gersten and Dimino quote the U.S. Department of Education as reporting, “The IQ-discrepancy criterion is potentially harmful to students as it results in delaying intervention until a student’s achievement is sufficiently low so that discrepancy is achieved” (p. 101).



RtI is of special significance in the area of reading because most students identified as learning disabled are poor readers (Lyon, 1995; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). RtI is generally used to address academic rather than behavioral problems, and the interventions usually target reading. According to Gersten and Dimino (2006), “RtI is integrally linked to the concept of providing intensive early intervention to prevent later reading failure” (p. 101).

The RtI process can also be viewed as an approach to school improvement. According to NASDSE (May 2006), “RtI is more than prereferral services; it is a comprehensive service delivery system that requires significant changes in how a school serves all students” (p. 2).

RtI Core Principles

Teach all children

RtI was developed on the belief that all children can learn and educators are responsible for identifying and fostering conditions that promote learning for all children.

Intervene early

It is best to intervene early when academic and behavior difficulties are relatively small.

Use multi-tier model

Employ a multi-tier model to effectively differentiate the nature and intensity of instruction to improve educational outcomes for all students.

Use problem-solving process

Use a clearly defined problem-solving process to identify individual needs and evaluate interventions that apply to all students in the system. The process should identify the problem and why it is happening, then identify interventions that will help rectify the problem, and finally monitor progress to determine if the interventions worked.

Use assessment

In RtI, three types of assessments are used—screening, diagnostics, and progress monitoring.

Screening provides low-cost, repeatable testing of age-appropriate critical academic or behavioral skills. It is a first step in identifying “red flags” and whether additional assessment is needed.

A diagnostic assessment is an in-depth assessment related to strengths and weaknesses in each skill area. It helps determine what students already know and can do and identify needed instruction.

Progress monitoring measures each student’s level of performance against identified goals for learning at regular intervals. Progress is measured by comparing expected and actual rates of learning. Instructional strategies are then adjusted to meet the individual student’s learning needs.

Use evidence-based instruction

Use instructional practices and interventions that have foundations in scientifically based research. Curriculum and instruction should have demonstrated effectiveness for the student’s situation and the school setting.

Monitor progress

Much of the assessment in RtI is progress monitoring and should be a form of dynamic assessment that measures change in students’ level or rate of learning (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a). Use assessment measures that are sensitive to growth and can be applied frequently to monitor student progress.

Use data

Central to RtI practice is the use of student data to make instructional decisions and to make classification and program placement decisions (e.g., moving students from the first tier to the second). This requires an ongoing data collection system.

Adapted from Batsche, G., Elliott, J., Graden, J. L., Grimes, J., Kovalesski, J. F., Prasse, D., Reschly, D. J., Schrag, J., & Tilly, W. D. (2006). *Response to Intervention: Policy considerations and implementation* (p. 22). Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc.

What is Response to Intervention?

Response to Intervention (RtI) presents a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention designed for implementation across general and special education based on students’ academic performance and behavior data. RtI reflects the philosophy of the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) that “children placed in special education are general education children first.”

In the RtI process, 1) the school conducts a schoolwide screening of academic skills; 2) students receive research-based instruction or intervention that addresses their needs; 3) teachers measure and monitor students’ progress; and 4) teachers use data to make instructional decisions including eligibility for special education. Instructional decisions are made based on students’ responsiveness to the instruction or intervention.

Batsche et al. (2006) define RtI as

the practice of providing *high quality instruction* and interventions matched to student need, *monitoring progress* frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals and *applying child response data* to important educational decisions. (p. 3)

There are two approaches to intervention or instruction using the RtI model: a problem-solving approach and a standard treatment protocol. The problem-solving approach is data-based and involves installing a decision-making system that allows teachers to design and implement personalized instructional strategies for individual students to improve the student’s rate of learning based on data (Batsche et al., 2006). The problem-solving approach seems to be the favored approach of school districts. According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2006a), its popularity is related to the fact that for each child an effort is made to personalize assessment and intervention. They write, “This individualized approach is a potential weakness as well as a strength. The problem-solving approach pre-supposes considerable expertise among practitioners and in assessment and intervention” (p. 95). Fuchs and Fuchs note that in order for the problem-solving approach to be successfully implemented, practitioners should be skilled in various types of assessments and interventions; have the judgment and experience to know which assessments and interventions apply; and have the knowledge and opportunity to measure the effectiveness of the interventions.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2006a) describe the standard treatment protocol as an alternative to the problem-



solving approach that is often favored by researchers. Using the standard treatment protocol means that students receive the same intervention for a fixed period of time, rather than individualized intervention unique to the learning needs of each child. Fuchs and Fuchs explain, “If students respond to the treatment trial, they are seen as remediated and disability free and are returned to the classroom for instruction. If they are unresponsive, they move to a more intensive Tier 2 standard treatment protocol” (p. 95). Then, if students show insufficient progress during the Tier 2 standard treatment protocol, “a disability is suspected and further evaluation is warranted” (p. 95). Using the standard treatment protocol in tiered intervention can be advantageous in that teachers can be easily

trained because there is one standard protocol to implement. It is also easier to check for fidelity of implementation because everyone knows what to implement (Batsche et al., 2006).

Both approaches have benefits and drawbacks. For example, the standard treatment protocol is likely to identify children who are “true positives” or truly have learning disabilities, but it is also more likely to identify children who are “false negatives.” These are children who at the higher tiers of RtI appear not to have learning disabilities, but who in reality could not survive in the regular classroom (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a). Batsche et al. (2006) suggest that a combination of the two approaches be used at Tier 2.

Essential Components and Implementation of RtI

There are three essential components to implementing RtI as outlined by Batsche et al. (2006): (1) multiple tiers of intervention, (2) a problem-solving method—not to be confused with the problem-solving approach to intervention or instruction previously discussed—and (3) an integrated data collection and assessment system. In order to address the essential RtI components, schools and districts will need to examine their systems and processes to identify existing logistical and infrastructure components that must be changed or modified to support RtI implementation.

Multiple Tiers of Intervention

The first component of RtI is multiple tiers of intervention that can be applied as schoolwide

academic and behavior supports. Figure 1 illustrates a three-tier RtI framework. Other RtI frameworks have from two to four tiers of intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a; Klingner & Edwards, 2006), but each involves screening, interventions, and progress monitoring. Regardless of which RtI framework is implemented, as students move through the tiers, the degree, intensity, duration, and sometimes types of intervention/instruction administered to the student increases.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2006b) discuss several points for consideration when building capacity for RtI at each tier. For example, schools and districts should consider the efficacy of the universal core program, the expected effect size for interventions, the proportion of students who respond adequately, and how to measure fidelity of implementation accurately. Regarding resources and infrastructure, it is similarly important for schools and districts to

Figure 1: Three-Tier Model of School Supports

Academic Systems

Tier 3

Intensive, Individual Interventions

- Individual students
- Assessment-based
- High intensity
- Of longer duration

Tier 2

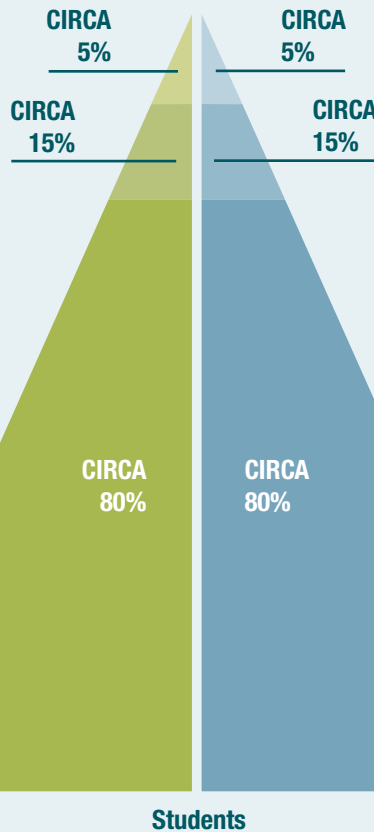
Targeted Group Interventions

- Some students (at-risk)
- High efficiency
- Rapid response

Tier 1

Core Instructional Interventions

- All students
- Preventive, proactive



Behavioral Systems

Tier 3

Intensive, Individual Interventions

- Individual students
- Assessment-based
- Intense, durable procedures

Tier 2

Targeted Group Interventions

- Some students (at-risk)
- High efficiency
- Rapid response

Tier 1

Core Instructional Interventions

- All settings, all students
- Preventive, proactive

Source: Batsche, G., Elliott, J., Graden, J. L., Grimes, J., Kovalesski, J. F., Prasse, D., Reschly, D. J., Schrag, J., and Tilly, W. D. (2006). *Response to Intervention: Policy considerations and implementation* (p. 22). Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc. Reprinted with permission from NASDSE (www.nasdse.org).

evaluate the feasibility and cost of implementing the universal core program, progress monitoring, and professional development for teachers. These factors should be considered for each subject area and age or grade level.

Tier 1

In Tier 1, also referred to as the “primary” layer of intervention, most students (about 80%) receive instruction based on state standards, the foundational core curriculum provided by the school or district. The curriculum should feature high-quality instruction that is differentiated to meet individual student needs. Schools and districts take a proactive and preventive approach to intervention in Tier 1.

Conduct universal screening. At the beginning of the school year, universal screening measures are usually administered to students in essential academic areas (e.g., reading and language arts) in order to identify students’ proficiency levels. Screening is a type of assessment that provides quick, low-cost, repeatable testing of age-appropriate critical academic or behavioral skills to identify struggling learners for further diagnostic testing and interventions (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006). Examples of screening measures sometimes used by schools/districts are state assessments, benchmarks, or districtwide criterion- or norm-referenced tests administered to students. The screening data are organized and then analyzed by teacher teams to assess group and individual performance on specific skills.

Provide interventions. Based on this data analysis, goals are set and high-quality instruction or interventions are designed and implemented to bring large numbers of students to adequate levels of proficiency in specific skills (Batsche et al., 2006). High-quality intervention means that instruction is rooted in scientifically based

research and incorporates proven methods that match student needs, as supported by IDEA and NCLB.

Monitor progress.

Progress monitoring is the practice of frequently assessing students’ academic performance to determine whether students are benefiting from instruction. Progress monitoring may also be used to modify programs for struggling students and gauge the rate of student improvement (Johnson et al., 2006). In order to monitor progress, Deno (1985) suggests that curriculum-based measures sensitive to growth in student performance over a relatively short time period be used. Teachers should obtain achievement data frequently in order to acquire sufficient progress monitoring data that can be graphed. (For more information on progress monitoring, please refer to the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring, www.studentprogress.org.)

Students demonstrating inadequate or poor response to instruction in Tier 1 based on progress monitoring data are identified and subsequently moved to Tier 2 for more targeted instructional assistance.

Tier 2

Instruction in Tier 2 (about 15% of the student population), also referred to as the “secondary” layer of intervention, is characterized by targeted short-term intervention in addition to core instruction (Batsche et al., 2006). Tier 2 instruction does not supplant instruction of the core curriculum; rather, it supplements it. This supplemental instruction can be developed through a standard treatment protocol, a problem-solving approach to instruction, or a combination of both. A standard treatment protocol provides structured or scripted interventions in a systematic manner in small groups. However, the problem-solving approach allows instructional support teams to plan personalized interventions to address an individual student’s needs. Based on progress monitoring data, students who achieve adequate progress in Tier 2 are reintegrated into

NCLB Definition of Scientifically Based Research

- Involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs
- Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment
- Involves rigorous data analysis
- Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data
- Is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs
- Ensures that experimental studies have sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication
- Has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts

Source: Part A—Sec. 9101. Definitions, #37.



Tier 1. Those students who continue to respond poorly to intervention, along with those still needing substantial instructional supports that are not available in the general classroom, are moved to Tier 3 for more intensive instruction.

Tier 3

Instruction in Tier 3, also known as the “tertiary” layer of instruction, is the most intense level of instruction provided to students in general education. It can be provided in the general classroom, and should be, according to NASDSE (2006, May). The organization explains in “Myths about Response to Intervention (RtI) Implementation”:

If Tier 3 is defined exclusively as special education, it is possible that additional intensive instructional programs would be set up OUTSIDE of the triangle model, which defeats the purpose of having the model for delivering services to all students. (p. 1)

Fuchs & Fuchs (2006b) take a slightly different view. They note:

In many but not all systems, tertiary intervention is conducted under the auspices of special education, given the student’s need for individualized rather than standard programming and given the expense and expertise required for individualized programming. In this regard, we note that RtI as a multitier prevention system, is designed to prevent long-term academic and social failure, not designed to prevent special education, per se. Special education, we believe, should be conceptualized as a valuable resource within the prevention system, with students entering and exiting as their progress warrants. (p. 621)

Instruction in Tier 3 is individualized, of longer duration, and administered in substantial blocks of time for the approximately 5% of students who continue to respond poorly to interventions in Tier 2 (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; Batsche et al., 2006).

Diagnostic assessments can be given to individual students in this level to determine strengths and weakness in levels of performance. Based on past history, a multidisciplinary team can be formed to determine if the student has a disability that requires specialized instruction, which can be provided under IDEA. Further evaluation may be warranted, and the team may also review data gathered during Tier 1 and Tier 2 for special education eligibility.

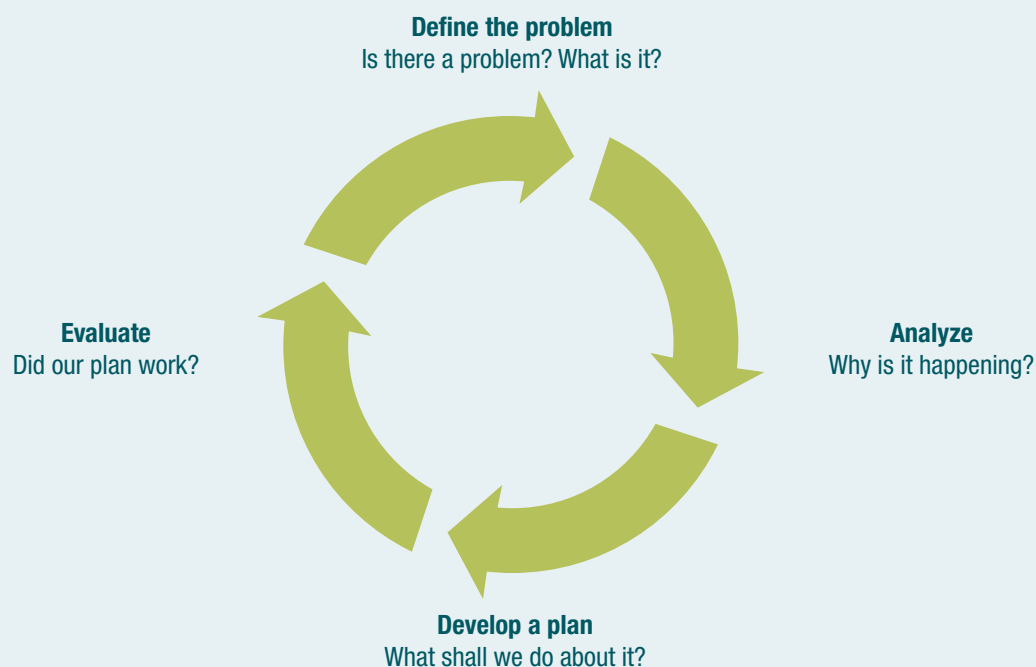
Problem-Solving Method

The second component to RtI is the problem-solving method or process, which consists of four steps: (1) defining the problem, (2) analyzing the cause, (3) developing and implementing an intervention plan, and (4) evaluating the effectiveness of intervention (see Figure 2). Again, this method is not to be confused with the problem-solving approach to designing instruction or intervention.

Batsche et al. (2006) explain, “The effectiveness of instruction at each tier must be determined through its implementation. As such, we must put in place a decision-making system that will help design of instructional strategies with a high probability of success, as well as provide for the frequent monitoring of instructional effectiveness” (p. 25-26).



Figure 2: Problem-Solving Method



Source: Batsche, G., Elliott, J., Graden, J. L., Grimes, J., Kovaleski, J. F., Prasse, D., Reschly, D. J., Schrag, J., & Tilly, W.D. (2006). *Response to Intervention: Policy considerations and implementation* (p. 22). Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc. Reprinted with permission from NASDSE (www.nasdse.org). For a more complete explanation of how problem solving is used at each of the RtI tiers, see pages 47–50 of this NASDSE report.

Integrated Data Collection System

Not surprisingly, an integrated data collection or assessment system is required to implement RtI effectively and make good decisions at each tier (Batsche et al., 2006). Togneri (2003) suggests that schools should use multiple measures of student performance because data plays a critical role in instructional decision making. Student progress data drives instruction or intervention in the RtI approach. It is imperative that schools integrate their data collection and assessment systems in a manner that is useful, relevant, and easily accessible for teacher use. Furthermore, assessment procedures differ at each tier.

For example, it has been recommended that proactive assessment procedures be used periodically throughout the year as universal screening at Tier 1. These assessments will have two functions: (1) to help design instruction so all students reach a certain level of proficiency, and (2) to determine which students will need more intensive instruction at Tier 2 (Batsche et al., 2006).

At Tier 2 the assessments must determine whether intensive remedial efforts result in the desired improvement. Then at Tier 3, the assessments must reliably distinguish which students are performing well below their peers, lacking the targeted skills. The Tier 3 assessments should also determine each student's rate of progress. Batsche et al. (2006) report that if the assessment at the first two tiers is thorough, it is likely that the third tier might include a summary of data collected previously.

Batsche et al. (2006) also recommend an evaluation of staff members in providing scientifically based, effective interventions at Tiers 1 and 2. They emphasize that “without sufficient treatment fidelity, determination of a student's RtI cannot be validly assessed” (p. 26). By establishing the essential components of an intervention and evaluating staff, it can be determined that an intervention was implemented as intended. Of course the concerns with treatment fidelity also highlight the need for providing quality in-service professional development (for example, professional development

Additional resources related to RtI

Secondary schools interested in a schoolwide implementation of RtI may refer to www.sedl.org/pubs/sedl-letter/v19n02.html for links to Web sites of states that are currently implementing RtI statewide across all grade levels. We have also posted a list of other helpful online resources related to RtI.



that meets the National Staff Development Council standards) that improves teacher knowledge and skill, both paramount to successful and reliable implementation of RtI.

Challenges to RtI Implementation

Some of the challenges to implementing RtI are 1) limited progress monitoring tools for secondary students; 2) funding issues; 3) redefining the roles of educators; 4) clarifying parental involvement; 5) integrating culturally relevant instructional strategies; and 6) scaling up RtI implementation.

Not much attention has been focused on implementing RtI in secondary schools (Duffy, 2007). One of the biggest challenges in secondary schools is the limited number of progress monitoring tools in various content areas. This shortage is exacerbated by the departmental structure of high schools, which makes a systemwide implementation of RtI difficult.

Funding issues could prove challenging for schools interested in connecting RtI implementation to other initiatives such as Reading First, dropout prevention, special education identification, and positive behavior intervention supports. The RtI framework is consistent with or aligned with the framework used by Reading First (Gersten & Dimino, 2006) and positive behavior support (Batsche et al., 2006). If done successfully, the pooling of funds from these various initiatives could prove to be a good allocation of resources to ensure that struggling learners' needs are met in the most cost-effective way.

Another challenging area that requires attention is redefining the roles of classroom teachers and other educational service providers, including speech and language pathologists; physical and occupational therapists; school psychologists; diagnosticians; and paraprofessionals.

In November 2006, NASDSE collaborated with numerous national educational organizations to publish a document titled *New Roles in Response to Intervention: Creating Success for Schools and Children*. This document discussed the unique roles of various education professionals and their responsibilities in the RtI approach.

Clarifying parental roles and involvement in the RtI approach and improving communication of progress monitoring data are emerging issues for schools implementing RtI. Implementing strategies that involve parents in their children's education has positive effects on students' academic achievement



RtI In the Field: Georgetown ISD

Stephanie Blanck, director of special education for Georgetown Independent School District (GISD), says, “Response to Intervention is a process, not an event.”

Blanck should know—she has been preparing for the use of RtI throughout the district for several years. She explains, “RtI builds on the campus support team process. It’s just one of many avenues a child may be recommended for.”

Georgetown is located about 30 miles north of Austin, Texas. GISD has a student population of more than 9,000. Last year the district piloted RtI at two elementary schools. This year, all nine of the district’s elementary schools will be using the process.

According to Blanck, district staff spent 2 years with focus groups learning about RtI and attending trainings, workshops, and conferences. GISD has adopted universal screening three times a year for all K–5 students. Students in grades 1–5 are screened in reading and math. The district is using a commercially available product for screening that has Spanish components.

Blanck says that in the past students were referred to special education primarily based on anecdotal information. There was not a universal screening process, nor extensive data collection.

“Now students are given targeted or intensive instruction at the time of need, there is a process for structured data collection, and decisions are made based on that data,” she reports. “The big advantage is that students are receiving high-quality, intense, research-proven instruction immediately as the need is identified.”

In the past, students may have needed instruction beyond that in the general classroom, but if he or she did not qualify for special education, they would not receive the additional instruction. “Now,” Blanck explains, “even if a child does not ultimately qualify for special education but still needs targeted instruction, he or she will get it.”

Georgetown staff will be working on increasing the number and variety of Tier 3 interventions this year. The district tries to match student intervention to student need. “Not all students have the same deficits, so we must really peel that onion down to the core to determine what is keeping that student from being successful. Staff are being guided in this analytical process until they can fully embrace it themselves,” Blanck says.

Despite the challenges of RtI, many see it as a viable approach for systemic school improvement.

and also strengthens school-family partnerships (Coleman, Starzynski, Winnick, Palmer, & Furr, 2006). To ensure parental participation in the RtI process, Johnson et al. (2006) recommend that schools and districts make parents feel welcome and comfortable in the school setting. They also suggest that parents remain involved in all phases of the RtI process and that schools inform parents of their children’s progress both orally and in writing. They emphasize that staff should communicate frequently and consistently with parents, especially parents of students responding inadequately to intervention who could be referred for special education services. The use of culturally relevant instructional practices for the benefit of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is a concern (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Schools and districts should be cautious in selecting evidence-based interventions to ensure that adopted interventions work with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Finally, large-scale implementation of RtI across all academic content areas and grade levels is very challenging for schools and districts (Bradley et

al., 2007). RtI is still an emerging approach, with some elements identified only in the past decade. Consequently, it will take some time for professionals to acquire an understanding of the core principles that guide the practice as well as the components that define it (Batsche et al., 2006). Schools and districts have limited knowledge and experience with scaling up RtI implementation—a situation that is expected to improve with time.

Despite the challenges of implementing RtI, many see it as a viable approach for systemic school improvement. Others see its promise in the field of reading as a sensible path to strengthen instruction and meet student needs early on, thus avoiding the misidentification of students as learning disabled and improving achievement for at-risk students. As Fuchs and Fuchs (2006a) recently wrote, “Right now, we most clearly see its promise in regards to how its multilayered structure can be implemented in the early grades to strengthen the intensity and effectiveness of reading instruction for at-risk students, preventing chronic school failure that corrodes children’s spirit and diminishes all of us who work on behalf of public schools” (p. 98).

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SEDL Receives AT&T Excelerator Grant

SEDL recently received an AT&T Foundation Excelerator grant in the amount of \$10,000. The money will be used to purchase hardware and

software that will help SEDL researchers apply advanced survey techniques to better assess and meet the needs of Texas educators and administrators.

From L to R: JJ Baskin, Director of Development, SEDL; Bob Digneo, Executive Director, External Affairs, AT&T; Eva Muñoz, Director, External Affairs, AT&T; Chris Moses, Director of Communications, SEDL; Raymond Hatfield, Director of Education Advocacy, AT&T; Dr. Victoria Dimock, Director of Improving School Performance, SEDL; The Honorable Kirk Watson, Texas State Senate, District 14; and Artie Arce, Principal, Bryker Woods Elementary and a member of the SEDL Board of Directors.



SEDL Staff Member Published in New Book for Teachers



Chris Ferguson

“Building Meaningful Relationships: Caring and Respect,” written by SEDL program associate Chris Ferguson, has been included in a new monograph titled *Promising Practices for Teachers to Engage with Families of English Language Learners* and edited by Dianne B. Hiatt-Michael of Pepperdine University. Full of practical information, the book is targeted to preservice and novice teachers who are searching for

ways to connect with families from diverse cultures and varying proficiency levels in English.

Besides Ferguson’s chapter, others include “Making Your Classroom Parent-Friendly to Families of English Language Learners,” “Engaging Parents as Leaders in Schools with ELLs,” and “Reaching Out from the Classroom to the Families.” For ordering information, visit www.infoagepub.com.

A New Identity for SEDL

We're the Same, but Different

Beginning November 1, 2007, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory will officially change its name to SEDL. Our partners, clients, and colleagues have always known us as "SEDL," and for decades our logo has prominently included the acronym. We decided it was time to draw on the solid reputation of SEDL and, because our work is nationwide in scope, move away from the regional connotation of the name "Southwest Educational Development Laboratory."



New Location

In November 2007, SEDL will move its headquarters to a new facility located in the Robert Mueller Municipal Airport redevelopment zone, a mixed-use urban community known as "Mueller." At Mueller

Our new address will be:
4700 Mueller Blvd.
Austin, TX 78723

we will be part of a community that includes Dell Children's Medical Center, a University of Texas medical research facility, retail businesses, and homes. Our new building will be a center for inquiry and demonstration. Check our Web site at www.sedl.org for details regarding a dedication ceremony in January 2008.

ADVANCING RESEARCH



IMPROVING EDUCATION

New Logo and Tagline Honor the Past, Look to the Future

To celebrate our official renaming, we have chosen a new logo and tagline.

The blocks of the new logo provide a contemporary, dynamic spin on the old logo, reflecting movement and progress.

The colors are a mix of the traditional blue with a modern green. Together they convey the energy, creativity, and vibrancy of our staff and organization.

The logo uses a classic serif font paired with a sturdy sans serif tagline that expresses the rigor and solidity of our work.

The tagline *Advancing Research, Improving Education* reflects our decades-long commitment to fostering the use and development of research-based practices, resources, products, and services as well as conducting research with our end goal in mind: a quality education for all learners.

ADVANCING RESEARCH



IMPROVING EDUCATION

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